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MOTHERS' TEACHING IN RESPONSE TO PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S EXPOSURE TO TELEVISION ADVERTISING

by

© Yvonne J. P. McFadzen

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN

FAMILY STUDIES

DEPARTMENT .....HOME.ECONOMICS.....

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Mothers' Teaching in Response to Pre-School Children's Exposure to Television Advertising submitted by Yvonne J. P. McFadzen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Family Studies.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which mothers teach pre-school children about the marketplace as a result of children's exposure to television advertising. Second, variables influencing the extent of teaching were identified. The family developmental framework chosen to conceptualize the problem, generated four variables proposed to influence the extent of teaching: (1) extent of children's purchase requests motivated by television advertising, (2) children's negativity as a result of denied, television-motivated purchase requests, (3) advantages thought to result from teaching, (4) parental perception of responsibility for teaching.

Teaching responses included those that contained information about the product price, quality or availability, the need for products, or the persuasive or misleading qualities of television advertising. Non-teaching responses included granting or denying purchase requests without explanation, or avoiding confrontation (e.g. saying "we'll see," etcetera).

A purposive, non-random sample of 42, English-speaking, television owning, middle and upper-middle income mothers with kindergarten children, completed structured, face-to-face interviews.

It was found that while television advertising was a major motivator of children's purchase requests, one half of mothers' responses to children's purchase requests did not transmit information about the marketplace, and 30% of mothers consistently responded in a non-teaching manner. Teaching responses to purchase requests included information about product characteristics (28.9%), the need for products (15.0%), product financing (2.6%) and the persuasiveness of television advertising

(0.9%).

About two thirds of mothers had tried to teach the child to understand television advertising independent of specific purchase requests. Fifty percent of mothers had tried to teach the child one or two concepts, usually the misleading or persuasive aspects of television advertising. The extent of mothers' teaching responses to children's purchase requests motivated by television advertising did not vary with any of the independent variables. Future research was recommended to determine why this was so. Planned teaching did not vary with children's negativity to a denied purchase request, or the extent to which television advertising motivated children's purchase requests. Possible explanations of these findings were given. As predicted, planned teaching did vary with the number of advantages identified to result from teaching (Pearson's $r = .386$, $p = .006$), and perceived responsibility for this teaching (gamma = .394, $p = .025$).

It was suggested that teaching about the marketplace as a result of television advertising was infrequent, although television advertising motivated children's purchase requests, and 50% of mothers reported children's anger or sadness as a result of a denied purchase request. Thus, television advertising posed a problem for children and their families.

It was concluded that there is a need (1) to increase parental awareness of the difficulties children have understanding television advertising, and (2) to develop parental abilities to facilitate children's learning about the intent of advertising, and children's coping with the desires motivated thereby. Also recommended was the moderation of television advertising directed toward children.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The effect of advertisements directed toward children has been a matter of debate throughout the last decade. In 1972, in the United States, the National Association of Broadcasters reduced the recommended limit on commercial messages on children's prime time television from 16 minutes to 12 minutes per hour (Robertson, 1972). The maximum established by the Canadian Broadcast Code is 8 minutes per hour of children's programming (Brown, 1978). However, since children under the age of 12 spend an average of 23 1/2 hours per week in front of the television set, the typical Canadian child views at least 3 hours of television commercials weekly and more if she or he chooses programs aimed at adults (Brown, 1978).

Consumer advocates argue that advertising persuades and manipulates children, affects intra-family processes, generates conflict, and negatively affects the socialization of the child and the development of his or her value systems (Robertson, 1972). Thus the banning of television advertising to children has been suggested. However, marketers argue that television advertising directed toward children can promote positive family interaction, from which the child learns about the economy and his or her role as a consumer (Robertson, 1972).

While evidence attests to the success of advertising in motivating children's purchase requests to their parents (Robertson, 1972; Ward & Wackman, 1972), there exists little conclusive and empirically derived information documenting the subsequent parent-child interaction. Critics have shown that parent-child animosity is increased due to the child's purchase attempts, since parents are either forced

to purchase expensive products or disappoint their children by not obtaining these items (Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Gorn & Goldberg, 1977; Sheikh & Moleski, 1977). Marketers however, have made no efforts to empirically support their contentions that television advertising stimulates the teaching of consumer skills. Thus the extent to which the parent teaches a child about responsible consumption as a result of the child's exposure to television advertising is not known.

It can be assumed that television advertising could stimulate the teaching of consumer skills either immediately after the child requests an advertised product, or at some other time independent of a specific purchase request. The latter would be the result of a conscious, planned teaching effort motivated by the child's exposure to television advertising, but not dependent upon a purchase request for a specific product.

Nothing is known about the effect of television advertising on parental plans for the teaching of consumer skills, however there is some literature available which indicates how a parent responds to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising. This research has focused primarily on the outcomes of a child's purchase request to the parents, that is, the level of parental yielding and the child's responses when the parent does not yield. There have been virtually no studies of how parents cope with the child's purchase request motivated by television advertising, prior to the ultimate granting or refusing of the purchase request. Conceivably, parents could respond by making reference to the advertisement, the product advertised, or both, or the parent could avoid making some

type of ultimate purchase decision by ignoring or delaying the discussion of the request. The degree of reasoning used when discussing a purchase request could also vary, so that a parent might impose an autocratic decision on the child, or alternatively, explain the decision in detail. What the child learns from these different responses could be important to the child's socialization as a consumer.

In 1977, Ward, Wackman and Wartella published research which elucidated the issue of how a mother responds to a child's purchase request. Mothers were presented with twelve hypothetical children's purchase request situations and were asked to decide which of five strategies they would employ if dealing with each of these situations. The strategies presented were the following: (1) the mother buys what the child asks for; (2) the mother agrees to buy if the child does his share (e.g. pays part of the cost, does chores, etc.); (3) the mother agrees to allow the purchase if the child uses his own money; (4) the mother refuses but explains why; (5) the mother refuses with no explanation.

Ward et al. found that mothers in all social classes, with children from kindergarten to grade six, were similar in their frequency of simply purchasing or refusing to purchase the item without explanation. Higher status mothers, were more likely to negotiate with their children or refuse with explanation. Mothers with older (grade six) children were more likely to negotiate with their children but less likely to refuse with explanation. Middle class mothers showed greater flexibility in responding to their children's purchase requests, than either high or low status mothers.

The mother's flexibility did not vary with the child's age.

Because Ward et al (1977) focused on children's purchase requests in general, he was not able to determine how a mother responds to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising. When responding to a television-motivated purchase request, a parent could verbally make reference to the product, or method of paying for the product. If this occurs, parental responses to television-motivated purchase requests would not differ from responses to other purchase requests. However, as previously stated, the parent could respond to a television induced purchase request by reference to the commercial, to the product, to both the commercial and the product, or to neither. Exactly what the parent refers to when responding to a child's purchase request has implications for what the child learns. The manner in which a parent responds to a child's purchase request also has implications for how much the child learns about consumption decisions.

A parent can use a wide variety of strategies when responding to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising. Some strategies, such as making non-committal responses (e.g., "we'll see," "maybe," etcetera), ignoring the child's request, or failing to explain the reasons for granting or denying a request, do not maximize the opportunity to teach the child about consumption. Other responses, such as denying or yielding to the child's request after discussing the product or the advertisement with the child, have greater potential to teach something quite specific.

Prior research into parental responses to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising has been insufficient to

answer a number of questions. It is not known what responses or combination of responses are used by a parent responding to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising. It is also not known the extent to which a parent uses responses which could teach the child something specific about consumption. Again unexplored, is the extent to which the teaching of consumer skills is motivated by the child's exposure to television advertising, but does not result from a purchase request for a specific product. There also remains a question of the variables which influence the type of responses a parent makes to a child's purchase requests. Such variables might include the number of television-motivated purchase requests made by the child, the degree to which the parent assumes that teaching about television advertising is his or her responsibility, the advantages and disadvantages the parent perceives there to be when teaching a child to understand television advertising, and the degree of disappointment that a child experiences when his or her purchase requests are denied.

Thus, this research study was initiated to determine the extent to which a parent acts to teach the child about the marketplace as a result of that child's exposure to television advertising, and to determine what variables influence the extent of this teaching. The answers to these questions are important, for they have direct implications in the controversy between marketers and consumer advocates. In order to assess whether or not television advertising to children should be banned, the extent to which it promotes positive family interaction and children's learning about the

marketplace, must be determined.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research has not focused on parental teaching about television advertising, however there is some literature that focuses on parental responses to children's purchase requests. Thus the review of literature pertinent to the research problem will include the following areas:

1. Parental Strategies in Responding to a Child's Exposure to Television Advertising
   (a) Parent-child discussion of television advertising
   (b) Parental strategies used when responding to a child's purchase request
2. Parental Yielding to a Child's Purchase Requests
   (a) Influence of product category
   (b) Influence of age of the child
   (c) Influence of social class and family structure
   (d) Influence of parental knowledge and attitudes
3. Effects of Parental Yielding Behavior on the Child

Parental Strategies in Responding to a Child's Exposure to Television Advertising

One potential benefit of family television viewing is the opportunity it provides for interaction between parents and children, that can lead to learning. When a child requests an item advertised on television, it provides an opportunity for the parents to teach the child about consumption. Parents can increase the child's understanding of the purpose of commercials and help them to evaluate

the information they contain, by talking to the child about commercials. Alternatively, they may avoid discussing the commercial per se, but discuss the product advertised. Some parents may choose to discuss both, and some may discuss neither.

Parent-child discussion of television advertising

Ward et al. (1377) found that about three-fifths of all mothers talked with their children about television commercials, although they did so infrequently. Kindergartners' mothers report somewhat less frequency of discussion than other groups. High-status mothers reported more frequent discussion of commercials than either middle or low status mothers.

Mothers were more apt to make comments about the nature of commercials in general, rather than specific comments about a particular commercial, although mothers of grade six children were equally likely to make both specific and general comments. About two fifths of mothers with children between kindergarten and grade six made general comments about commercials, with the great majority (85%) of these comments being negative (Ward et al., 1977).

Parental strategies used when responding to a child's purchase request

Parents can respond to a purchase request induced by television advertising by reference to the commercial, to the product, to both the commercial and the product, or to neither. As previously cited, mothers talk to children about commercials rather infrequently, and research into the strategies parents use to respond to television-motivated purchase requests has largely been limited to the study of whether or not parents yield to the child's purchase request, and the negative effects on children if parents do not yield. The

manner in which the parents respond to a purchase request has at least two important implications. First, the manner in which the parent refuses a television-induced purchase request influences the child's degree of acceptance of the parent's decision.

In 1978 Prasad examined the effects of advertising directed toward 8 to 10 year old boys ($n = 64$), when the mother attempted to persuade the child to select an unadvertised product over an advertised one, using either a reasoning approach (i.e., explaining why the unadvertised product was superior) or a power-assertive approach (i.e., insisting that the child select the unadvertised product without providing an explanation of why). Prasad found that when the product was moderately attractive the mother could dissuade her son using a reasoning approach, while a power assertive approach was ineffective. When the product was highly attractive, neither form of negative feedback provided sufficient counterinfluence.

In addition to affecting the child's degree of acceptance of the parent's decision, the manner in which a parent responds to a child's purchase request has implications for how much the child learns about consumption decisions. A parent can adopt a number of different strategies in responding to the child's purchase request. She or he can ignore the request, advise the child to stop making requests without granting or denying the request, or make some noncommittal response (e.g.,"maybe," "we'll see," etc.), thus avoiding confrontation with the child's request. The parent could also yield to the request or refuse to buy the product without explaining the basis for the refusal. If the parent responds in any of these ways,

an opportunity to teach the child about consumption is not used to its fullest potential.

Alternatively, a parent might yield to the child's request after discussing the purchase with him or her, perhaps negotiating an arranged cost. She or he could also refuse the request, but explain the reasons for the refusal. These responses enable the parent to teach the child something quite specific about consumption. In a study of 615 mothers, Ward et al. (1977) presented mothers with twelve hypothetical children's purchase request situations and asked them to decide which of the following five strategies they would use in dealing with these situations: (1) buying what children ask for; (2) agreeing to buy if the child does his share (e.g., pays part of cost, does chores, etc.); (3) agreeing to allow purchase if the child uses his own money; (4) refusing but explaining why; (5) refusing with no explanation.

In an examination of these five strategies, Ward et al. found that mothers in all social classes, with children from kindergarten to grade six were similar in their frequency of simply purchasing or refusing to purchase the item without explanation. Mothers with older (grade six) children were more likely to negotiate with their children than other mothers. The authors attributed this to the greater resources and persuasive skills of older children.

The "refuse but explain" response decreases with the child's age. Fifty percent of kindergartners' mothers used this response in approximately half of the purchase request situations, compared to one-quarter of mothers with sixth grade children.

Mothers of higher status were more likely to use negotiations or "refusal with explanation" strategies. The authors extended a number of hypotheses to account for these findings. First, high status mothers may have had greater expectations regarding the child's sharing of responsibility for purchases. Second, higher-status mothers may have had a greater willingness to explain things to their child or third, higher-status mothers may have felt more obligated to justify their refusal than mothers with a lower income.

Ward et al. (1977) also determined the mother's flexibility in handling purchase requests under different circumstances, that is, her propensity to shift responses between situations. Approximately 30% of mothers demonstrated high flexibility in responding to purchase requests. While flexibility did not differ with the child's age, it was related to social status in a curvilinear fashion, with medium-status mothers demonstrating greater flexibility than high or low-status mothers.

To summarize, Ward et al. (1977) found that negotiation increases with age of child, and social class of the mother. Middle-status mothers were more likely to use a variety of responses, while low-status mothers used more authoritarian responses.

The number of studies which concern themselves with how a parent denies or grants a child's purchase request and the implications of each strategy are extremely limited in number. Children's purchase requests, as an opportunity for consumer socialization and training, have not been pursued in the literature. Research has concerned itself primarily with "whether" a parent yields to a television-induced

purchase request not "how" a parent yields to or denies that request.

Parental Yielding to Child's Purchase Requests

In general, yielding by parents to their children varies by product category and increases with the age of the child. The relationship between social class and yielding is inconsistent across studies. There is some evidence which suggests that parental attitudes toward television and advertising may be related to their tendency to yield to their children's purchase requests.

Influence of product category

Yielding depends on the product category and whether the product is requested primarily for the child's consumption. Ward and Wackman (1972) reported yielding levels of 87% for cereal, 63% for snack foods, 54% for games and toys, 42% for candy, 39% for toothpaste, and 16% for shampoo.

Observational studies carried out in supermarkets indicate that parents yield to a high number of cereal requests. Galst and White (1976) found that parents yield to 45% of children's purchase requests ($n = 45$) for cereal. Atkin (1975b) reported 62% of parents, and Wells and Lo Sciuto (1966) reported 26% of parents yielded to a child's request for cereals. Wells and Lo Sciuto (1966) also noted that parents yielded to 30% of the child's requests for candy, and Caron and Ward (1975) found that parents yielded to 31% of children's requests for toys ($n = 84$). These results evidence a fairly high level of parental yielding for child-relevant products. The degree of parental yielding is also associated with the child's age.

Influence of age of the child

Positive associations between the child's age and his or her parents' yielding levels were found in a number of research studies, (Atkin, 1975a; Ward & Wackman [1972]; Ward et al., 1977; Wells, 1965) whereas other research has shown a lack of a relationship (Berry & Pollay, 1968; Caron & Ward, 1975). Accepting the finding that parental yielding increases with the child's age, Wells hypothesized: "Older children are more selective and more circumspect especially when the product is one they are going to consume themselves" (1965, p. 9). Older children, then, may make more carefully considered purchase requests. Ward et al. (1977) offered the explanation that older children are more skilled negotiators and may have more resources to bargain with.

Influence of social class and family structure

The strength of the age-parental yielding relationship may be affected by relevant variables such as social class and family structure, although the modifying influence of these intervening variables has not yet been investigated. The relationship of social class to parental yielding has been studied independent of other variables and mixed results have been obtained (Atkin, 1975a; Caron & Ward, 1975; Goldberg & Gorn, 1978; Hoffman, 1972; Ward & Wackman, 1972; Ward, Wackman & Wartella, 1977; Wells & Lo Scuito, 1966). The weight of the evidence favors the hypothesis of a positive relationship between social class and yielding.

Influence of parental knowledge and attitudes

Information about the relationship of parental knowledge and

attitudes to yielding behavior is scattered and incomplete. Research by Clancy-Hepburn (1974) provided evidence of an interaction between parents' and children's attitudes toward food advertising. Mothers who were well-informed about the validity of nutritional claims had children who expressed significantly fewer preferences and fewer requests for advertised foods, and reported less consumption of these products. Furthermore, mothers well-informed about advertising claims tended to yield less to children's requests for snack foods. Berey and Pollay (1968) found that yielding by a mother to a child's purchase request for breakfast cereals was not significantly related to either the child's assertiveness or the mother's child centeredness. Research by Ward and Wackman (1972) revealed that the more a mother sanctioned television viewership by watching television herself, the greater the number of purchase requests made by the child, and the more likely she was to yield to these requests.

Thus, well-informed, nutritionally conscious, mothers were least likely to yield to a child's request for breakfast cereals. Mothers with a high level of television viewing were most apt to yield to a child's purchase request.

Summary of parental yielding behavior

Evidence was offered that yielding may be a function of product category, age of the child, social class level, and parental knowledge and attitudes. These factors alone do not fully explain yielding behavior; other variables, especially family interaction style, are undoubtedly involved.

Effect of Parental Yielding Behavior on the Child

Parental mediation of children's comsumption requests is both an opportunity for parental instruction regarding consumption, and a potential source of parent-child conflict. Most research on children and advertising is geared to hypotheses of negative effects, the prevalent findings generally focus on conflict and disappointment rather than on positive learning and socialization outcomes. Robertson and Rossiter (1976) studied children's disappointment generated by not receiving the Christmas presents they had requested. Disappointment, measured two weeks after non-receipt, was not as high as anticipated. Parents refused 57% of children's requests, but only 35% of the children indicated disappointment when their requests were denied. The authors suggested that children's disappointment could have been higher immediately after denial, and that the two-week lapse before the measurement was taken was responsible for the low level of reported disappointment.

Disappointment was most pronounced among younger children, children with high television exposure and, contrary to expectation, children from homes with a high degree of parent-child interaction. Robertson and Rossiter proposed that children from these homes might have felt more "let down" if they had discussed presents and did not receive them. The children handled refusal in a number of ways - external blame, 41% (e.g., "my parents couldn't afford it"); internal denial, 36% (e.g., "I didn't really want it"); no explanation, 14%; and self-blame, 9% (e.g., "I was a bad boy").

In a study by Sheikh and Moleski (1977), children were presented with a story in which the main character was quite similar to themselves. The main character watched a television program including commercials and then requested a toy he had seen advertised. The children felt the following outcomes would occur when the parents refused the request: unpleasant affect (33%); acceptance (23%); aggression (23%); persistence (16%); and irrelevant response (5%) (n = 144). Girls were more likely than boys to predict a negative effect, and grade three students were more likely to predict aggression than grade one or grade six children.

Research by Atkin (1975b) focused on arguments and anger as compared to the Robertson and Rossiter focus on disappointment. After they were denied toys, Atkin found that one-sixth of the children argued with their mothers "a lot" and another one-third argued "sometimes." One-fifth of the children became angry "a lot" about toy denials, and two-fifths became angry "sometimes." Argument and anger over cereal denials followed a similar, but somewhat less pronounced pattern. Atkin reported a tendency for arguments and anger to increase with the age of the child. The partial correlation between Saturday morning television exposure and a combined conflict/anger index (controlling for demographics) was .10. Based on path analysis, Atkin concluded that TV exposure has no direct link to conflict/anger but worked indirectly through its impact on the frequency of requesting products. In parallel interviews with mothers of these children, Atkin found that mothers felt that their children were disappointed in 21% of cereal denials and 29% of toy-purchase denials. Overt anger was reported in 5% of cereal-request denials and 10% of toy-request

denials. Television exposure was partially correlated (controlling for age, sex, race, and school performance) with anger at .11 for cereals and .18 for toys.

In another study, Atkin (1975a) recorded conflict and disappointment resulting from cereal requests, based on an in-store unobstrusive observation method. In cases involving denial of the child's request by the parent, conflict occurred 65% of the time, and unhappiness resulted 48% of the time. There was some tendency for conflict and unhappiness to be highest in the middle age group (6 to 8 years old). Atkin noted that "...conflict is seldom intense or persistent. Displays of child anger or sadness are also short-lived in most cases" (p. 10). Exposure to television advertising was not examined in this study.

An experimental study by Goldberg and Gorn (1978) assessed the extent to which exposure to a television commercial for a toy, affected a child's feelings toward a parent who denied a purchase request for that toy, and second, the level of disappointment when the toy was not received. One hundred and sixty-six, 4 and 5 year old children were randomly allocated to control and experimental conditions. Children in the experimental groups (n = 112) viewed commercials for a toy in the context of a 10 minute neutral program. A control group viewed the program without any commercials. When asked to predict how a child would respond if his father did not buy the advertised toy for the child subsequent to a purchase request, 60% of the control group thought that the child would "still want to play with his daddy," while only 40% of the experimental group thought so. The responses remained consistent 24 hours later. This suggests that exposure to

television commercials for toys with a subsequent purchase request denial can contribute to a child's negative feelings toward his or her father.

Summary

Children's exposure to television advertising provides an opportunity for parents to train the child about consumption, however this focus has not been pursued in the literature (Robertson, 1979). What is known suggests that the manner in which a parent responds to child's purchase request affects the degree of acceptance the child demonstrates for the parent's advice. For 8 to 10 year old boys, the mother's use of a reasoning approach was more persuasive than a non-reasoning approach when trying to persuade the child to choose an unadvertised product over a moderately desired advertised product (Prasad, 1978). Ward et al. (1977) found that the use of a reasoning approach increased with the mother's social class and the age of the child.

It is evident that factors other than social class and age have to be examined. The nature of a parent's response to a child's purchase request and his or her method of coping with a child's exposure to television advertising is probably a function of many factors including the parent's expectation of who is responsible for the child's consumer education, the stage of the family life cycle, and many other relevant factors.

While the process of parental response to children's exposure to advertising has not been studied, the outcomes of children's purchase requests have received attention. Parental yielding to a child's purchase request is a function of the product category, age of the

child, social class level, parental knowledge and attitudes, and possibly many other factors which have yet to be identified. The child's disappointment over a refused purchase request is a function of his or her age, sex, exposure to television, the degree of parent-child interaction over the purchase request and other undetermined factors.

The research relevant to parent-child interaction over television advertising is scattered and incomplete. Robertson (1979) emphasized the need to research parental mediation of television advertising to children, to get at the whys underlying reported behavior, the need to include variables other than age and social class, and the need for multivariate analyses and a specification of how variables interact. It has been established that advertising affects children and motivates them to become surrogate salepersons soliciting their parents to make purchases for them. It is also clear that children often experience disappointment if a purchase request is refused, although the manner in which a mother interacts with the child affects the child's response to a commercial message relative to their response to a mother's counter-influencing information. What is not clear is the variety of strategies that a parent uses when coping with the results of a child's exposure to television advertising. It is not known how these strategies vary with demographic, behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of the parent and child, the family structure, the product category and characteristics, the characteristics of the television advertising and other factors affecting the meaning of the request. Also unknown is the effectiveness of each type of strategy in avoiding negative consequences of a purchase request denial, and facilitating

consumer learning.

These unknowns give rise to a host of research questions, only some of which may be approached in this study. A conceptual framework can be used to determine those questions most relevant for study. The application of such a framework and its implications for the selection of research questions, is detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK - DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

Research in the area of children and advertising has focused on the child, rather than on family interaction, and the framework used has primarily been a developmental framework at the individual level. Since the purpose of this study is to examine parental use of television advertising as a teaching opportunity, the family developmental framework would appear to be useful.

The Family Developmental Framework

The family developmental framework seems well-suited to examining parental teaching of marketplace concepts to children. The developmental approach to family studies is concerned mainly with norms and behavior over time (Rowe, 1978). As time proceeds, different norms come into play, are modified and have various effects on one's behavior. Hence, rather than focusing on the family at one static point in time, it focuses on the time dimension of the family system, the family life cycle. The family member and the family as a unit, advance through various stages of the family life cycle, confronting certain role expectations which have been called developmental tasks (Duvall, 1971). Developmental tasks are tasks that arise at, or about, a certain time in the life of an individual or family, successful achievement of which leads to happiness and success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual or family, disapproval by society, and difficulty in later tasks (Havighurst, 1953). Thus, the better equipped a family is for each of its members to meet his or her individual developmental tasks and the more clearly the family

accomplishes its group tasks, the more successful is the development of the family.

Origin of Developmental Tasks

Developmental tasks can be derived from either of two primary origins, physical maturation or cultural pressures and privileges (Aldous, 1978). Cultural pressures are those rewards and penalties that the individual receives (or anticipates receiving) for various behaviors. The individual strives to narrow the gap between what is perceived as really existing and what is perceived to be ideal. What is perceived to be ideal is culturally defined, but the drive to achieve a developmental task comes from within the individual (Duvall, 1971).

When an individual or a family member is about to assume a given developmental task, at least four operations take place (Duvall, 1971):

1. She or he wants to cope effectively with conflicting demands placed upon him or her, which can be done by accomplishing the developmental task;
2. She or he perceives new possibilities for his or her behavior;
3. She or he forms new concepts of his or her role;
4. She or he is motivated enough to work toward achieving the developmental task.

Pressures to achieve a developmental task emerge at times believed appropriate in the culture for the individual to function in the roles assigned (Aldous, 1978; Duvall, 1971). Thus, developmental tasks change over the life cycle of an individual or a family. In addition, when the same developmental task is operative at more than

one stage in the individual or family life cycle, the nature of the task may change among the stages. For example, families must provide for the socialization of their members, but the socialization needs of an infant vary from those of a pre-school or school-age child (Duvall, 1977). Duvall (1972) details developmental tasks for each stage of the family life cycle, although at times the stage scheme and associated tasks appear to be somewhat arbitrary. It is important to be aware that these stages and tasks have not been proven to exist by empirical methods. They do, however, provide a useful system for analyzing specific aspects of individual or familial behavior. A brief description of Duvall's model of tasks of parents with pre-school children follows.

Developmental Tasks of Parents with Pre-School Children

The socialization of offspring is a developmental task of all parents (Duvall, 1971), however in television-owning families with pre-school children, this task has become increasingly difficult. "Television has a potent influence on children, shaping their attitudes toward, and expectations of themselves and others long before they can read or write" (Duvall, 1977, p. 259). Pre-school children, that is, those children between two and a half and six years of age who have not entered grade one but may attend pre-school or kindergarten (Duvall, 1971), are fascinated by television and can learn important values from this medium. Thus, in order to successfully socialize pre-school children, parents must cope with those aspects of television that transmit harmful values or those inconsistent with their own (Duvall, 1977).

One component of a child's socialization, is the acquisition of values related to the consumption of goods and services. Children can

learn values regarding consumption from exposure to television advertising (Robertson, 1972). The unmediated exposure of children to this medium may result in a desire to over-consume (Robertson, 1972). Alternatively, a parent could use television advertising creatively by responding to a child's exposure to television advertising in a fashion that would teach the child something about rational consumption. By doing this, parents could help their children understand the marketplace. Concepts such as buying and selling, the cost, quality and availability of products, the need for goods and services, means of paying for purchases and the reality of limited resources could all be taught as a result of the constructive mediation of television advertising.

Parental teaching at the pre-school stage about the nature of television advertising and the products portrayed therein, may be an important precursor to the teaching of other consumption-related concepts at later stages. Developing meaningful understandings of the use of money, by learning to buy wisely and stay within resources, reconciling differences between wants and resources, and getting a basic orientation into the nature of money in everyday life are all concepts which parents of school aged children teach (Duvall, 1971). Parental teaching about television advertising at the pre-school stage, could facilitate the teaching more advanced marketplace concepts to the child of school age.

In addition to helping the child comprehend the marketplace, parental teaching about the nature of television advertising could reduce purchase requests, as well as some of the disappointment experienced by a child when his or her purchase request is denied.

Such teaching at the pre-school age could lead to less unhappiness for the child and for the parents.

Thus, parental mediation of television advertising is important in the socialization of children when the family owns a television set (Duvall, 1977). It is critical at the pre-school stage, when the child is fascinated by television and may learn many values and attitudes from it (Duvall, 1977).

Research has not focused on parental mediation of television advertising. It is not known the degree to which parents use the opportunity provided by television advertising to teach their child something specific about consumption, nor is it known why some parents use television advertising more constructively than other parents. Developmental theory provides some insights into these unknowns.

Duvall (1977), applying developmental theory, suggested that teaching children to understand television advertising would be assumed as part of a developmental task if the rewards for performing the task are greater than the sanctions, if the task were perceived to be a part of the individual's role, and if the task would reduce conflicting demands on the individual.

Television advertising is designed to motivate children's purchase requests. A parent would face conflicting demands as a result of advertising directed toward children because parents who must keep the family financially solvent (Duvall, 1971), would probably have to deny a significant proportion of children's purchase requests. If the child reacts negatively to a denied purchase request, the parent would continue to face conflicting demands: the need to maintain the morale of the child (Duvall, 1971) while keeping the family financially

solvent. This dilemma could have even greater significance for low income families who may be required to deny a greater proportion of purchase requests (Gorn & Goldberg, 1977). The disappointment of these children could intensify parental guilt or hostility (Greene, 1973), and result in a degeneration of intra-family relationships.

Thus the degree to which television advertising affects children's purchase requests (and the child's responses to denied purchase requests) could influence the extent to which a parent teaches a child to comprehend television advertising. However, in order for a parent to assume a task, she or he must believe that there will be benefits in performing the task. Benefits of teaching a child to understand television advertising could include such things as reduced purchase request, reduced negativity in response to a denied purchase request, and facilitating the child's consumer education.

In addition to perceiving benefits of teaching the child to comprehend television advertising, the parent must believe that it is part of his or her role before she or he will assume the task. A parent who believes this task to be someone else's responsibility or no one's responsibility, is unlikely to assume the task.

Thus, use of the developmental framework results in several propositions:

1. The extent of parental teaching about television advertising positively correlates with the frequency of children's purchase requests.
2. The extent of parental teaching about television advertising positively correlates with the negativity of the child's responses to denied purchase requests which were stimulated by

television advertising.

3. The extent of parental teaching about television advertising positively correlates with the extent to which the parent assumes this to be his or her responsibility.
4. The extent of parental teaching about television advertising positively correlates with the number of advantages (benefits) parents perceive to result from performing the task.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter identifies the research questions, and describes the methods and instruments used to sample, collect and analyze the data.

Research Questions

A review of literature pertinent to the issue of children and television advertising reveals the existence of many unanswered questions. There appears to be a lack of research into parental strategies used when coping with the results of a child's exposure to television advertising. Also unknown is how these strategies vary with demographic, behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of the parent and child, the family structure, the product category and characteristics, the characteristics of the television advertising and other factors that affect the meaning of the request.

While research into these unknowns can be directed toward both parents, there is some evidence which suggests that mothers are more involved in the consumer socialization of young children than are fathers (Sheikh & Moleski, 1977; Ward et al., 1977). Because of this, it would seem most fruitful in exploratory research to examine how mothers respond to children's exposure to television advertising. Consequently questions forming the basis of this study are focused on mother-child behavior, rather than father-child behavior. The exclusion of fathers from this research is done for reasons of feasibility and should not be considered as an indication of their importance in the consumer socialization process.

The application of the developmental framework to the issue of maternal mediation of television advertising provides a basis upon which

to organize and priorize pertinent variables and suggests possible interrelationships. Propositions derived from the conceptual framework chapter, can be posed as the following research questions:

1. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the number of children's purchase requests stimulated by television advertising? (proposition 1)
2. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the degree of negativity the child experiences as a result of a denied purchase request that was motivated by television advertising? (proposition 2)
3. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the degree of responsibility perceived for this task? (proposition 3)
4. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the perceived costs and/or benefits of performing this task? (proposition 4)

In order to answer and elucidate these questions, an additional three questions must be included:

5. To what extent do mothers report that television advertising influences their children's purchase requests?
6. To what extent do mothers use children's purchase requests motivated by television advertising to teach their children something specific about consumption. That is, what percentage of mothers' responses to children's purchase requests have the potential to teach children something specific about being a consumer and what could mothers' responses potentially teach their children?

7. To what extent do mothers attempt to teach their children to understand television advertising, independent of a specific purchase request? What do mothers attempt to teach their children, what teaching methods are employed, and what effects of teaching are reported?

Assumptions

Several assumptions are made in the formulation of these questions. First, it is assumed that television advertising does affect children's wants and purchase requests. Second, it is assumed that television advertising can be dealt with in a manner which would teach the child something specific about the marketplace. The third assumption made is that if teaching activity does occur, it is most likely to be undertaken with kindergarten children, in middle and upper income families. Fourth, it is assumed that mothers are equally or more likely than fathers to undertake this teaching. Finally, it is assumed that different responses to a child's purchase request stimulated by television advertising could teach the child different things about being a consumer.

Choice of Design

The Use of Exploratory Research Designs

The degree of theoretical development and supporting empirical data in an area of research determines to a large extent whether an exploratory or an explanatory study is most appropriate. When there is relatively little work, either empirical or theoretical, applicable to a field of study, a more general exploratory design is most useful. It can broaden the base of knowledge by identifying the variables of a problem, discovering additional variables, and increasing

information on the relationships which may exist among variables (Rodgers, 1973).

The study of the process by which mothers react to children's purchase requests motivated by television advertising, and what they do to teach children about the nature of television advertising falls within the realm of exploratory research. Previous researchers in this area, primarily marketers, have emphasized the issue of whether or not the parents yield, and the resulting impact on the child. Thus the final outcome of television advertising has been focused upon, with virtually no emphasis placed on the process of responding to a child's exposure to television advertising. Theoretical frameworks used have included (1) the developmental framework applied to the child at the individual level, specifically Piaget's cognitive development model, and (2) attribution theory, again applied to the child at the individual level. Developmental theory at the individual level has been the more popular of the two. Developmental theory at the family level has not been applied to the study of maternal mediation of television advertising.

Where there exists a lack of previous empirical research, an exploratory study broadens the base of existing knowledge in the area. It is for this reason that this study has assumed an exploratory approach.

In an exploratory study, the instruments used and samples obtained can vary from those required in experimental research. The manner in which they vary will be described under the appropriate sections following.

Sampling Procedure

The interests of this study necessitated the selection of a particular sample: mothers from English-speaking, middle and upper middle income (average annual family income greater than $17,500), families living in Greater Edmonton, with children in kindergarten. A further sample criterion was the ownership of at least one television set. It is in this group that the teaching about television advertising is most likely to occur (Duvall, 1971; Ward et al., 1977).

Although five school districts were contacted, a sample of sufficient size and quality was not forthcoming. Thus, an alternative to the use of schools to obtain a sampling frame, "Snowball" sampling (Sudman, 1976), was employed. This procedure entailed identifying several members of the target population, interviewing these members and asking them to identify other members of the same population, then interviewing those members, and so on.

The lack of randomness and perhaps representativeness, limits the inferences which can be made about the general population, however the non-probability sample is appropriate at the earliest stages of a research design when exploratory data gathering is worthwhile to pinpoint the major dimensions of a topic (Sudman, 1976).

Data Collection

A purposive, non-random sample of 42 mothers was recruited. All the mothers who were identified as meeting the sample criteria were contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the study.

Face to face interviews were conducted in the respondent's home at her convenience. Face to face interviews were considered necessary in order to obtain exploratory information of the most detailed nature,

however they do have drawbacks in terms of time, money and nonavailability of respondents when the interviewer calls. In order to help overcome the latter drawback, interviewing times were arranged by phone, and this resulted in only one call-back. As to the former drawbacks, expense was reduced by using a single geographic location, and time required was reduced by pretesting the instrument to ensure maximum information obtained in minimal time. Thus, interviews took an average of 30 minutes to complete.

No incentives were used to encourage participation in the study, however mothers were asked at the end of the interview if they wished a synopsis of the study. All but one mother requested a copy of the findings.

Dependent and Independent Variables

The instrument used was designed to elicit information on the following independent and dependent variables:

1. Dependent variables:
   (a) mothers' responses to children's purchase requests;
   (b) mothers' planned teaching about television advertising.
2. Independent variables:
   (a) the extent to which the mother reported that her child's purchase requests were motivated by television advertising;
   (b) the extent to which the mother indicated that teaching the child about television advertising was her responsibility;
   (c) the degree of negativity the mother reported the child to experience as a result of a denied purchase request that was motivated by television advertising;

(d) the advantages and disadvantages the mother reported to exist in teaching the child to understand television advertising.

Instrumentation

The interview schedule (Appendix 1) consisted of questions which can be classified into the following subsections:

1. Demographic characteristics (questions 17 to 23).
2. The number of TV sets owned by the family and the presence or absence of cable (questions 5, 6).
3. Number of hours spent by mother and/or child watching television (questions 7 through 12).
4. The extent to which the mother believed that TV advertising affected her child's purchase requests (question 2).
5. The reported frequency of the child's purchase requests (question 1).
6. Mother's reported reponses to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising (question 3).
7. Mother's report of how her child responds to a denied purchase request (question 4).
8. Mother's report of purposive teaching about TV advertising (question 16).
9. Mother's report of who is responsible for teaching the child to comprehend television advertising (question 15).
10. Costs and benefits which the mother reported to exist when teaching her child to comprehend television advertising (question 14).

Questions were designed to elicit maximum information while

maintaining rapport with the mothers. A detailed description of the questions follows.

1. Demographic questions. Demographic questions included open ended questions which elicited information about household composition (i.e. age, sex and number of family and non-family household members), parents' highest level and years of schooling, and parental employment. A closed ended question was used to obtain a measure of total family income.

To encourage respondent's cooperation, demographic questions were introduced with a phrase which indicated why the information was required (Oppenheim, 1976). Sensitivity of demographic questions was further reduced by placing them at the end of the interview schedule (Oppenheim, 1976). By this time, rapport should have been established, and the respondent should have been convinced that the inquiry was genuine (Oppenheim, 1976).

With regard to specific questions, probes were used to determine the nature of each parent's employment, in order to ensure that responses could be classified (Oppenheim, 1976). To measure total family income, a closed ended question was used. The income categories were printed on a card which was given to the mother to read. After she read the card, the mother was asked to select the number which most closely corresponded to total family income. The purpose of this procedure was to reduce the question's sensitivity by allowing an indirect rather than a direct indication of family income. Cards were also used in other closed questions where a list of possible reponses were permitted. The purpose of these cards was to facilitate recall of the responses permitted.

2. Extent of television viewing. The extent of mother and/or child television viewing was elicited through self-report, open-ended questions replicated from the Ward et al. 1977 study. Weekday viewing and weekend viewing were obtained in separate questions, since altered weekend television schedules and living patterns could affect viewing. The number of hours spent watching television weekly were then calculated.

3. An index was used to determine the extent of television advertising's influence on a child's purchase requests, the major influence of child's purchase requests, and mothers' responses to a child's purchase requests. The index consisted of twelve items including food items (cereal, snack food, candy, soft drinks, soup), non-food, child-related items (game or toy, record album, clothing), and non-food, non child-related items (shampoo, toothpaste, aspirin, household cleaner) (Ward et al 1977), about which the mother was asked questions relating to influences. The list of items was drawn from Ward et al. 1977 interview schedule. The question regarding the frequency of the child's purchase request for each item was also replicated from that study.

An index of items was preferred to a single global question, because it is known that the responses of mothers and children vary with different product stimuli (Ward et al., 1977). Thus, any efforts to determine the nature of children's purchase requests and mothers' responses should include a measure of their responses in relation to a variety of items.

The question which was used to determine the nature of the mother's

responses to a purchase request elicited by television advertising was left open-ended in order to provide the greatest freedom of response. Mothers were asked to report the manner in which they last responded rather than to report how they usually responded, in an attempt to reduce the number of socially desirable responses. Teaching responses were operationally defined as including any responses which contained messages (either verbal or non-verbal) about the persuasive or misleading qualities of television commercials, messages (either verbal or non-verbal) about the characteristics advertised, the need for the products advertised, or method of paying for the product. Non-teaching responses were operationally defined to include refusing or agreeing to purchase the advertised product without explanation, or avoiding discussion (e.g., saying "maybe," or "we'll see," etc.).

The question which dealt with the child's response to a denied purchase request attempted to determine the mother's general expectations of the child's response, so the mother was asked how her child "usually" responded.

4. Discussion and teaching about television advertising. The content of what the mother talked about with the child in regard to television advertising was elicited through an open-ended question. Questions relating to the nature of the mother's reported teaching about television advertising, and the effects of teaching were also open-ended. Open-ended questions allow for the maximum variety of reponses, and therefore were used extensively in this study.

Data Handling

Data for all questions was categorized, coded and keypunched. The

SPSS program was used for analysis, providing statistics to describe the occurrence of maternal teaching behavior in response to a child's exposure to television advertising. Appropriate proportional measures of association produced by crosstab runs were used to measure the extent of relationship of independent variables with each dependent variable.

Coding of data and Construction of Indexes to Measure Variables

Indexes were constructed in order to measure independent and dependent variables. The manner of their construction is described below.

1. The extent of maternal teaching reponses made to a child's purchase request was calculated by dividing the number of teaching responses by the total number of responses made in reaction to a television-motivated purchase request. Teaching responses to a purchase request included any which explained something about the quality, price or availability of the product. Responses not considered to be teaching responses included either agreeing to buy or denying a request for an advertised product without explanation, or avoiding confrontation (i.e., saying "maybe," or "we'll see," etc.) with no further action on the request.

2. Mother's planned teaching was measured by summing the number of items a mother tried to teach in relation to understanding television advertising or the products portrayed within. Coded categories included the misleading or persuasive qualities of television advertising, the quality, price or availability of advertised products, the importance of limiting consumption, and the acceptability of the behavior of

actors in advertisements.

3. The effect of television advertising on children's purchase requests was measured by four methods. The first method summed the product categories in which television was cited as the major influence of purchase requests. The second method, which was designed to account for the extent of television-motivated purchase requests relative to other purchase requests, divided the number of product categories for which television was cited as the major influence of purchase requests, by the total number of products that the child requested.

The third and fourth approximations to the effect of television advertising took into account the frequency with which children's purchase requests occurred. For the third measure, the frequency of children's purchase requests were summed for all categories in which television was cited as the major influence. Since the frequency of purchase requests was measured at an ordinal level, purchase requests which occurred "very often" were assigned a weight of 3, while purchase requests occurring "pretty often" received a weight of 2, purchase requests occurring "not too often" merited a value of 1 and "no purchase requests" scored a 0 value. Thus, if television advertising was the major influence in five categories, of which two products were requested "pretty often", and three were requested "not too often", the score for the influence of television advertising on purchase requests would be 7. The fourth measure summed and weighted total purchase requests in the manner of television-motivated requests, then divided the total purchase requests into television-motivated purchase

requests.

4. The child's reaction to a denied purchase request was coded into four categories: anger, sadness, persistence (i.e. repeated requests for the product) and acceptance of the denial. In the analysis, which evaluated the negativity of the child in response to a denied purchase request, an ordinal scale was constructed. Anger and sadness were combined into one category as the most negative response that a child made; persistence formed a less negative category, and acceptance of the denial was considered to be the least negative response.

5. The advantages and disadvantages that a mother identified to exist when teaching a child to understand television advertising, were calculated by separately summing the number of advantages and the number of disadvantages. Each of these was run as a separate variable. An estimate of relative benefits identified, was made by subtracting the number of disadvantages from the number of advantages identified. No attempt was made to weight the advantages and disadvantages in terms of their importance to the mother.

6. The degree to which the mother indicated that teaching about television advertising was a parent's responsibility, was coded into four categories which included: (1) parents should teach because it's their job; (2) parents should teach because they are available when the child is watching television; (3) parents should teach; no reason identified for doing so; and (4) parents should not teach their child to understand television advertising.

These categories were considered to form an ordinal scale, from most committed to teaching the child to understand television

advertising, to least committed. Mothers who identified the teaching as a parent's job were considered to be more committed than mothers who indicated that they would teach because no one else was available at an appropriate time. These two groups were classified as more committed than mothers who indicated that if the task should be done, parents would be responsible, but could not identify a reason why they should undertake the task. The least committed group was composed of those who indicated that it was not the parent's job to teach the child to understand television advertising.

Statistical Analysis

The manner in which data is analyzed is limited by the nature of the population, the sample, the sample variability, and the measuring instrument. Inferences to populations are dependent upon a randomly chosen sample (Hughes & Grawoig, 1971). The sample drawn in this study is a Snowball sample, which may differ from a random sample in the amount of heterogeneity within the sample and the sample bias, that is the degree to which sample values vary from population values. The most conservative approach dictates the use of statistics only to describe the sample itself, and this application of statistics was used.

The nature of the population from which the sample is drawn and the variation within the sample also restrict the inferences that can be made. Parametric statistics assume that the sample is drawn from a normally distributed population, and that the within group variances of subsamples are homogeneous. If one cannot assume that a population is normally distributed, or that variances are approximately equal, non-parametric statistics should be used (Blalock, 1972; Hughes &

Grawoig, 1971; Kerlinger, 1973). However non-parametric statistics are not as powerful as parametric statistics, that is, they are not as likely to reject the null hypothesis when it is actually false. Therefore many authors suggest the use of parametric statistics if at all possible (Blalock, 1972; Hughes & Grawoig, 1971; Kerlinger, 1973). Kerlinger makes the argument that the importance of normality and homogeneity is over-rated and unless there is good evidence to believe that populations are seriously non-normal and that variances are heterogeneous, it is unwise to use non-parametric tests in place of parametric ones.

Thus, when selecting statistics, two rules were used. First, statistics were chosen according to the level of measurement used, and second, probability or proportional reduction of error statistics were used for ease of interpretation. These statistics have a direct intuitive meaning and can be compared to other statistics of this type. Non-probability statistics can be compared only to themselves and even then they are often incomparable when the tables are of unequal size (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, Bent, 1975).

The statistical tests used included Pearson's correlation coefficient and Gamma. Each is described briefly.

Pearson's r is an appropriate statistic for describing the relationship between two variables when a linear model is appropriate and when data is continuous. The sign of r indicates the direction of the relationship and the size of the numerical value of r indicates the strength of the relationship. When testing a correlation coefficient for statistical significance, it is assumed that scores on each variable are normally distributed, however failure to meet

this assumption has no consequences if the degrees of freedom are greater than 25 (Welkowitz, Ewen, Cohen, 1971). The degrees of freedom were usually greater than 25.

Gamma measures the degree of association between two ordinal level variables. It takes on a positive value if concordant values are predominant, a negative value if discordant pairs predominate and a zero value if they are equal. The value of gamma represents the probability of correctly guessing the order of a pair of cases on one variable once the ordering on the other variable is known. The sign indicates the direction of ordering to predict. Gamma readily reflects both positive and negative association between variables, handling small cell frequencies. Gamma is interpreted as a proportional reduction in error measure (Champion, 1970; Nie et al., 1975).

Limitations of the Study

As with all social science research, this study has certain limitations, including limitations of design, sampling, instrumentation and data analysis. A major limitation in this study was the possible bias introduced by the use of Snowball sampling. Thus, a description of the sample is necessary prior to evaluating the study's limitations.

The Sample

The sample (n = 42) was limited to English-speaking, middle and upper income mothers (median family income = $30,999) of kindergarten children drawn from households that owned at least one television set (average number of television sets = 1.5) and possessed cable television. The mothers were all married and living with their spouses. Most mothers were not employed outside the home (n = 32); of those

mothers who held remunerative positions (n = 10), most worked part-time (n = 9) in a teaching (n = 6), nursing (n = 2) or a free-lance designer capacity (n = 1). One mother worked full-time as a teacher. The average age of mothers was 33.0 (range 21 - 39; s.d. = 3.656); the average number of years of mother's education including grade school was 14.595 (range 10 - 21 years, s.d. = 2.651) with completed high school and bachelor's degrees being the modal nominal categories, each category consisting of 13 mothers. Families had an average of 2.24 children (range 1 - 4; s.d. = 0.576), none of whom was older than 9 years of age. The children of whom mothers spoke were mostly five years of age (78.6%), the remainder being six years of age. These children were usually first (50.0%) or second (45.2%) born, although two (4.8%) were third born. Approximately one half of the kindergarten children were male (54.8%) and one half female (45.2%).

Sampling Limitations

When a sample is drawn from a target population, it is desirable that the sample reflect as accurately as possible the population values. The degree to which the sample characteristics differs from population parameters is a measure of "sample bias." Generalizability is restricted by the degree to which the sample differs from the target population (Sudman, 1976).

This sample was limited by the use of a Snowball sample, which results in the higher probability of selecting respondents who are known to many others, and a lack of independence among sample members (Sudman, 1976). It is not possible to know how accurately the sample represented the target population (i.e., middle and upper income mothers with at least one child in kindergarten) although it is known that

the sample watched approximately the same amount of television weekly ($\bar{x}$ = 13.5 hours weekly) as the average adult female in Edmonton in 1978 ($\bar{x}$ = 13.0 hours weekly) (Kennedy, Kinzel, Northcott, 1978), and that families in the sample had approximately the same number of children (average number of children = 2.24) as the average Edmonton family (average number of children = 2.19). In terms of years of schooling, the mothers had an education ($\bar{x}$ = 14.60, s.d. = 2.651) that did not differ statistically (t = 1.63, df = 492) from that of the average adult female in Edmonton in 1978 ($\bar{x}$ = 13.02 years, s.d. = 6.315). The sample was wealthier (median family income = $30,000 - $34,999) than the average Edmonton family of 1978 (median family income = 17,500 - $19,999) (Kennedy et al., 1978), with incomes equal to, or greater than 55% of Edmonton families. This income level was anticipated and considered desirable, since it is in such families that the majority of teaching was reported to occur (Ward et al., 1972). All of the mothers who were contacted agreed to participate, which eliminated the problem of sample self-selection.

It cannot be determined how many mothers were eligible to take part in the study and were not identified, nor is it possible to determine how different the sample was in attitudes and behaviors from the general population of kindergarten mothers. Furthermore, the use of a sample from a single urban region is limited to the extent that it varies from samples which could be obtained from other areas. Any bias in the sample would reduce the credibility of the findings. The small sample size could further reduce the sample's generalizability, although it is within the recommended range for exploratory studies

(n = 20 to 50) (Sudman, 1976), and should have been adequate given the lack of major breakdowns in the data analysis (Sudman, 1976).

Limitations of Data Collection

Family research is open to bias, because the family is considered to be a private domain, and respondents may avoid too much disclosure, intentionally or unintentionally. Secondly, even for open, talkative respondents there is a problem of biased individual perceptions. Husbands, wives and children do not always agree on what is occurring within a family (Safilios-Rothschild, 1971). Thus, the results may be dependent on who comprises the sample.

The face to face interview technique had certain limitations including high cost in terms of the interviewers' time and travel, and the need for skillful handling on the part of the interviewer, to ensure comparability of interviews and ease on the part of the respondents. However, the interviews achieved good cooperation from respondents, allowed for complicated questions and probing of answers, achieved a full response and allowed for greater sensitivity of misunderstanding of questions by the respondents. In addition, making suggestions to the respondent was reduced through careful ordering of questions.

The instrument drew some of its questions from the Ward et al. (1972) "Mother's Interview", however several of the questions were adapted and more were added. In essence, the instrument was new and thus extremely limited in terms of reliability and validity.

Content validation of the instrument consisted of carefully

examining each item for its accuracy of measurement. The instrument was evaluated by a panel of faculty members and a group of six mothers on whom it was pretested. Pretesting was done in an attempt to ensure that the questions were understandable and probed what the researcher intended that they should probe.

Occasionally mothers would supply information relevant to an approaching question, as part answer to a preceeding question. If necessary an effort was made to clarify the information at the time the question came up in the interview, with the interviewer stating the question and repeating the answer previously given. At this time, the mother had an opportunity to contribute more information if she wished. If clarification was not required, the interviewer proceeded to the next appropriate question. This procedure, while avoiding tedium for the respondent, limited the study in that the research instrument varied slightly as the occasion demanded.

The comparability of interviews was also limited by the extent to which conversation not directly related to the questions on the instrument occurred during the interview. While such conversation was kept minimal, the mothers did consider the interview to be a social occasion. Rapport was quickly established and probably enhanced by allowing for these digressions. The mothers enjoyed the interview situation and talking about their children, and frequently expressed this during and after the interview.

A further limitation of data collection was that respondents were asked to report or predict their behavior. Actual behavior was not observed. The use of reported rather than actual behavior

results in some degree of inaccuracy because respondents may not be able to recall or verbalize how they behave. Furthermore, much teaching behavior may occur more by modeling, or non-verbal teaching than by verbal attempts. While mothers were given the opportunity to express the use of modeling, few did so. It is possible that mothers used non-verbal teaching, but were unable to report how they used it.

Also, reactivity may have occurred because the respondent was aware of being tested and may have chosen what she considered to be an appropriate role (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, Sechrest, 1966). Reactivity may also have occurred due to characteristics of the interviewer, or increased practise of the interviewer. In addition, the measurement tool may have changed over time (Webb et al., 1966). For example, mothers may have felt differently and responded differently if the instrument wereused at Christmas time rather than in the spring as it was. Because the interviews were completed within two weeks, the latter bias was unlikely, however the former two biasing conditions may have occurred. Any of these forms of reactivity would have affected the validity of these findings.

Limitations of Analysis

Any statistical procedure is dependent upon a random sample if it is to be used to draw inferences about the general population. Because Snowball sampling was employed, the analysis in this study can be applied in the strictest sense only to a description of this sample.

While the level of measurement of the dependent variables was quite strong (interval or ratio level), the sample size was rather

small. Thus, it would have been desirable and possible to apply multivariate statistics that allowed for the simultaneous examination of factors (Robertson, 1979), however the small sample size prohibited this approach. Thus the analysis in this study is limited in that it does not describe the simultaneous impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Design Limitations

This design used ex post facto research, that is a "systematic empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred, or because they are inherently not manipulable. Inferences about relations among variables are made, without direct intervention, from concommitant variation of independent and dependent variables" (Kerlinger, 1973, p. 379). There are three major weaknesses in ex post facto research: (1) the inability to manipulate independent variables, (2) the lack of power to randomize and (3) the risk of improper interpretation. Even if two variables covary, it is not statistically possible to identify if there is any causal relationship. For example, even if mothers who identified more advantages resulting from teaching children to understand television advertising were more likely to do so, it does not necessarily follow that identifying advantages leads to more teaching behavior. It could be that the relationship between the two is spurious, or that the direction of the effect is the reverse. Reducing the risk of improper interpretation, and gaining clues as to the direction of causation results from the use of a conceptual framework, such as the family developmental framework used in this

study. The validity of research was increased through the use of predictive statements.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The SPSS computer program (Nie et al., 1975) was used to obtain frequencies, crosstabulations of selected variables, and respective statistics. The results of this analysis are summarized in this section.

Effect of television advertising on children's purchase requests (Research Question #5)

Television advertising was cited as the major influence of childrens' purchase requests in 5 of the 12 product categories (cereal, shampoo, toothpaste, games and toys, and household cleaner). Seeing a product in the store was also cited as a major influence on purchase requests in 5 categories (snackfood, candy, soft drinks, soup and clothing) while a friend's influence was the major influence in the category of record albums. One mother indicated that her child never asked for television advertised products, while one mother attributed 5 purchase requests and another attributed 6 purchase requests to television advertising. The majority of mothers indicated that television advertising motivated 3 (n = 16) or 4 (n = 9) purchase requests out of a possible 12.

In the categories in which television advertising was most often cited as the major influence of purchase requests, purchase requests occurred "very often" in 5.2% of cases, "pretty often" in 21.9% of cases, "not too often" in 34.3% of cases and "never" in 38.6% of cases. This did not differ from the frequency of overall purchase requests where the following frequencies occurred: "very often," 6.3%; "pretty often," 19.4%; "not too often," 33.5%; "never," 40.7%.

Mother's teaching in response to a child's purchase request motivated by television advertising (Research Question #6)

In response to the 114 children's purchase requests reported, 51.8% of mothers' responses did not have the potential to transmit to the child any specific information about the marketplace. These responses included 27.2% refusals without explanation, 14.9% agreements to make the purchase, without explanation, and 9.7% non-commital responses (i.e., saying "maybe" or "we'll see," etc.). Of the remaining responses, 15.0% included information about the need for a product, 28.9% included information about product characteristics (i.e., product quality [23.7%], product availability [2.6%], product price [2.6%]), and 2.6% contained information about product financing). Only 0.9% of reported responses had the potential to teach the child something about television advertising per se, and that was directed toward teaching the child about its persuasiveness.

Comparing the number of teaching responses, relative to all responses to children's purchase requests, approximately 30% of mothers consistently responded to a child's purchase request in a manner which could not transmit specific information about the marketplace, 35% made teaching responses some of the time, and 35% made teaching responses most of the time (Table 1).

TABLE I

NUMBER OF MOTHERS REPORTING TEACHING RESPONSES FOLLOWING CHILDREN'S PURCHASE REQUESTS BY PERCENTAGE OF TEACHING RESPONSES

Percentage of Teaching Responses	Number of Mothers
0.0%	12
01 - 50%	15
51 - 99%	5
100%	10

Mother's planned teaching (Research Question #7)

Approximately 30% of mothers never talked to their children about television advertising, and those who did talked about the topic infrequently. The frequency of discussing different topics varied somewhat (Table II).

TABLE II

NUMBER OF MOTHERS REPORTING DISCUSSION OF TELEVISION ADVERTISING NOT STIMULATED BY CHILDREN'S PURCHASE REQUESTS, BY TOPIC DISCUSSED AND FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSION

	Frequency of Discussion			
Topics Discussed	Very Often	Pretty Often	Not Too Often	Never
Misleading aspects of television advertising	5	7	12	18
Persuasiveness of television advertising	2	7	9	24
Need or desire for advertised product	1	4	4	33
Cost of advertised product	0	0	1	41
Quality of advertised product	0	3	4	35

TABLE II Continued

NUMBER OF MOTHERS REPORTING DISCUSSION OF TELEVISION ADVERTISING NOT STIMULATED BY CHILDREN'S PURCHASE REQUESTS, BY TOPIC DISCUSSED AND FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSION

Topics Discussed	Frequency of Discussion			
	Very Often	Pretty Often	Not Too Often	Never
Availability of advertised product	2	1	1	38
Behavior of actors on advertisements	1	2	1	38

About two thirds of mothers (64.3%) had tried to teach a child to understand television advertising, independent of a specific request. Of this group, 23.8% had tried to teach the child one concept, and 26.2% had tried to teach the child two concepts. Several mothers (7.1%) had tried to teach the child three concepts and 7.1% had tried to teach the child four concepts.

The majority of teaching attempts related to teaching the child something about the misleading qualities of advertising, while somewhat fewer were directed toward teaching the child about the commercials' persuasiveness. Teaching attempts were also aimed at transmitting information about limiting wants or desires for advertised products, the characteristics (price, quality, availability) of advertised products, and the behavior of actors on commercials (roles, sex-stereotyping, etc.) (Table III).

TABLE III

FREQUENCY OF MOTHERS' PLANNED TEACHING ATTEMPTS BY CONCEPT TAUGHT

Concept Taught	Number of Mothers Teaching Concept
Misleading aspects of television advertising	21
Persuasiveness of television advertising	13
Need or desire for advertised products	9
Cost of advertised products	1
Quality of advertised products	4
Availability of advertised products	2
Behavior of actors on television advertisements	3

Planned teaching attempts occurred as a result of the mother's concern about the overall frequency of the child's purchase requests (59.7%) or out of a concern for the child's consumer education (25.8%). In 14.5% of teaching efforts, both the frequency of purchase requests and the concern for the child's consumer education were cited as motivators of a planned teaching attempt.

Mothers used discussion as the primary teaching method (75.5% of teaching attempts) followed by taking the child to the store to see the advertised product while discussing it or the advertisement (14.7%). Having the child listen to a record or watch a television show on the topic and then discussing it were methods used infrequently (8.1%). The least common teaching method was that of buying the product to show the child that the product was of poor quality and that the advertising

had been misleading (1.6%).

The age at which mothers attempted to teach a concept varied somewhat with the concept (Table IV). Teaching the child about the quality of the advertised product occurred earliest, at approximately 2.8 years of age, while teaching the child about product availability occurred somewhat later. Concepts related to understanding the persuasive and misleading aspects of television advertising were first introduced at approximately four years of age.

TABLE IV

MEAN AGE OF CHILD WHEN MOTHER FIRST MADE PLANNED TEACHING ATTEMPT, BY CONCEPT TAUGHT

Concept Taught	Mean Age of Child (Years)	Age Range (Years)
Misleading aspects of television advertising	3.7	2 - 5
Persuasiveness of television advertising	4.0	2 - 6
Need or desire for advertised products	3.4	1 - 5
Cost of advertised products	4.0	4
Quality of advertised products	2.8	2 - 3
Availability of advertised products	5.0	4 - 6
Behavior of actors on television advertisements	4.0	3 - 5

Many mothers who had tried to teach a concept reported that they had been either somewhat (45.8%) or very successful (39.0%) although a minority felt that they had experienced no success (6.8%) or could not judge (8.5%). The amount of success they reported did not vary with the concept taught. The criterion for judging the success of

teaching included the child's increased acceptance of a denied purchase request (24.9%), the child's verbalization of the concept (22.4%), reduced purchase requests by the child (19.7%) or verbalization of the concept without increased acceptance of a denied purchase request (10.0%). A large percentage of mothers (22.4%) indicated that they used no identifiable measures to determine if their teaching efforts had been effective.

On 24 occasions, mothers indicated that they wanted their child to learn something about television advertising but had made no teaching attempts. The following reasons were cited for not teaching: (1) teaching the child to understand television advertising wasn't important (37.5%), (2) the mother had never thought to teach the concept (25.0%) or, (3) the child was too young to understand the concept even if a teaching attempt were made (20.8%). Many mothers (16.7%) could not identify a reason why they had not taught something which they wanted the child to know.

Mother's teaching attempts as a function of television advertising's influence on children's purchase requests (Research Question #1)

The frequency of the child's purchase requests motivated by television showed no relationship to either the percentage of teaching responses made by mothers to children's purchase requests, or the number of planned teaching attempts. Also, neither the number nor the percentage of product categories in which television advertising motivated children's purchase requests was associated with the dependent variables (Table V).

TABLE V

SUMMARY OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: # of teaching responses to TV motivated purchase requests / # of responses to TV motivated purchase requests x 100	Dependent Variable: # of planned teaching attempts
# of categories in which TV advertising was cited as primary motivator of purchase requests	Pearson's r = -0.043 df = 42 p = 0.395	Pearson's r = 0.048 df = 24 p = 0.381
% of categories in which TV advertising was cited as primary motivator of purchase requests	Pearson's r = 0.021 df = 11 p = 0.447	Pearson's r = 0.143 df = 68 p = 0.183
# of categories in which TV advertising was cited as primary motivator of purchase requests, weighted by frequency of purchase requests	gamma = -0.047 df = 70 p = 0.447	gamma = 0.111 df = 40 p = 0.231
% of categories in which TV advertising was cited as primary motivator of purchase requests, weighted by frequency of purchase requests	gamma = 0.088 df = 175 p = 0.505	gamma = 0.107 df = 100 p = 0.225

TABLE V Continued

SUMMARY OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Independent Variable	Dependent Variables: # of teaching responses to TV motivated purchase requests / # of responses to TV motivated purchase requests x 100	Dependent Variables: # of planned teaching attempts
# of advantages reported to result from teaching a child to understand TV advertising	Pearson's r = 0.023 df = 35 p = 0.442	Pearson's r = 0.386 df = 20 p = 0.006
# of disadvantages reported to result from teaching a child to understand TV advertising	Pearson's r = 0.060 df = 14 p = 0.3532	Pearson's r = 0.231 df = 8 p = 0.070
# of advantages minus # of disadvantages reported to result from teaching a child to understand TV advertising	Pearson's r = -0.002 df = 35 p = 0.494	Pearson's r = 0.258 df = 20 p = 0.050
degree to which a mother reports that it is her responsibility to teach her child about TV advertising	gamma = 0.146 df = 21 p = 0.442	gamma = 0.394 df = 12 p = 0.025
Negativity of child's reaction to denied purchase requests	gamma = 0.186 df = 14 p = 0.334	gamma = 0.180 df = 8 p = 0.385

Mother's teaching attempts as a function of perceived responsibility for the task (Research Question #3)

Mothers reported that they would undertake the task of teaching about television advertising because it was their job (9.5%), or because they were available to do it (61.9%). Other mothers (11.9%) said they would assume the task of teaching about television advertising, but could not identify a reason why they should, and 16.7% of mothers would not assume the task. The degree to which the mother assumed that teaching about the marketplace was her task was positively associated with the number of planned teaching attempts that occurred (gamma = .394, p = .025).

Mother's teaching attempts as a function of the perceived costs and/or benefits of performing the task (Research Question #4)

Mothers were able to identify the following advantages of teaching about television advertising: improving the child's skill to be critical (35.7%) and to compare products (11.9%), discriminating among advertised products (26.2%) and evaluating needs (20.5%), and increasing the child's knowledge of the price of advertised products (2.4%), the persuasiveness of advertising (19.0%) and the use of advertising to pay for programs (2.4%). Other advantages cited included fewer children's purchase requests (2.4%) and fewer negative responses to denied purchase requests (7.1%).

Disadvantages cited in teaching the child about television advertising included making the child suspicious (4.8%), confusing the child (7.1%) or consuming too much of the mother's time (7.1%).

Many mothers (40.5%) could cite only one advantage, however 26.2% cited no advantages, 19.0% cited two advantages, 9.5% cited

three advantages, and 2.4% cited each of four and five advantages. Most mothers (85.7%) could cite no disadvantages of teaching, although 9.5% cited one disadvantage and 4.8% cited two disadvantages.

The more advantages of teaching a child to understand television advertising that a mother could cite, the more likely she was to carry out a planned effort to teach the child to understand television advertising (Pearson's $r = .386$, $p = .006$), such that identification of advantages accounted for 14.4% of the variance in planned teaching. The greater the difference between the number of benefits cited relative to the number of costs, the greater the number of teaching attempts made (Pearson's $r = .258$, $p = .050$), although it is important to note that frequently no disadvantages were cited. The extent of teaching responses made to a child's purchase requests motivated by television advertising was not associated with the identification of advantages or disadvantages in performing the task, and identification of disadvantages was not associated with either of the dependent variables.

Summary of the Results

The extent to which the mother made teaching responses to a child's purchase requests motivated by television advertising was not found to vary with any of the independent variables. The extent to which a planned teaching attempt was carried out was not shown to vary with the negativity of the child's reaction to a denied purchase request, or the extent to which television advertising motivated purchase requests. Planned teaching did vary with the number of advantages of teaching that the mother was able to identify, and the degree to which she indicated that this teaching was her responsibility.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which mothers made responses which transmitted information about the marketplace as a result of their child's exposure to television advertising, and secondly, to identify some of the factors that influenced the extent of teaching about television advertising or products portrayed therein. This information would provide evidence in the debate between marketers, who argued that advertising creates positive family interaction, and consumer advocates, who believed that television advertising negatively affected the child and the family (Robertson, 1972). The results of the study, that is, answers to the research questions, are discussed in this chapter.

Research Question #5. To what extent do mothers report that television advertising influences their child's purchase requests? Television advertising was cited as the major influence of purchase requests in 5 of 12 product categories. Seeing the product in the store ranked equally with television advertising as the most frequently cited motivator of children's purchase requests. This suggests that television advertising is a very potent influence of children's purchase requests, and thereby creates occasions when teaching about consumption could occur.

Extent of Mother's Teaching in Response to a Child's Exposure to Television Advertising

Mothers' teaching in response to a child's exposure to television advertising occurred through two mechanisms: (1) mothers' responses to children's purchase requests stimulated by television advertising

and (2) the mothers' teaching about television advertising independent of a specific purchase request.

The two research questions which addressed these concerns are discussed confluently, and include:

Research Question #6. To what extent do mothers use children's purchase requests motivated by television advertising to teach their children something specific about consumption. That is, what percentage of mothers' responses to children's purchase requests have the potential to teach children something specific about being a consumer and what could mothers' responses potentially teach their children?

Research Question #7. To what extent do mothers attempt to teach their child to understand television advertising, independent of a specific purchase request? What do mothers attempt to teach their child, what teaching methods are employed, and what effects of teaching are reported?

It was found that 28% of mothers never talked to their kindergarten child about television advertising, and that 51.8% of their responses to the child's purchase request did not have the potential to transmit information about the marketplace. Those mothers who talked to their children about television advertising did so infrequently.

The degree of discussion identified in this study differed somewhat from that found by Ward et al. (1977) who reported that 46% of mothers of kindergarten children talked to their children about television commercials, but that a greater percentage of higher income mothers talked about this topic than either low or middle income mothers. The use of a predominantly middle and upper middle income group in this research may in part account for the comparatively high percentage of

mothers (72%) who talked to their children about television advertising. It is also possible that the differences may have resulted from the different nationalities of the samples. Canadians who watch both U.S. and Canadian channels may be more attuned to advertising as an influence on the child. Several mothers indicated that they were forced to refuse children's purchase requests for no reason other than that they believed the product was not available locally. Some mothers indicated in casual conversation that they were glad Canadian commercials were not as "pushy" as American commercials or that Canadian regulations were more strict. The contrast that mothers believed existed between American and Canadian programs may have alerted Canadian mothers to television advertising directed toward children more so than their American counterparts studied by Ward. One final explanation could relate to the time difference between the studies. Ward et al.'s work was conducted in 1972, and mothers' concern about television advertising and its effect on children may have increased over the decade, perhaps resulting in the increased discussion of television advertising.

Differences between planned teaching responses and teaching responses to Children's purchase requests

An interesting pattern difference emerged between planned teaching and teaching responses to television advertising. Virtually no discussion of television commercials resulted from a child's specific purchase request, although some discussion was initiated by the mother as a planned teaching attempt. Two fifths of mother's planned attempts were aimed toward teaching the child that television advertising was persuasive, while a further one quarter of planned teaching attempts

dealt with the misleading qualities of advertising. Other concepts taught in a planned manner included the limiting of need or wants (17.0%), with product characteristics being mentioned in 8.1% of cases. This differed from the pattern of teaching responses following a child's purchase request, where the product characteristics were taught in 29% of cases and advertising's persuasiveness was taught in less than one percent of cases, with teaching about needs or wants remaining fairly constant. This study does not shed light on why such a difference would occur, however it is possible that the mother, faced with a purchase request for a specific product felt that it would be more effective to discuss the product rather than the advertisement. Once a desire for a specific product had been formed, it was the product that the child was interested in, not the commercial itself. The mother may have felt it was most efficient to avoid introducing an alternate issue. The overall frequency of a child's purchase requests or the mother's concern for the child's consumer education could have resulted in the mother's planned teaching about the commercial, in order that the child might better understand the purpose of the commercial and perhaps be less affected by it.

Effectiveness of mothers' teaching attempts

Concepts regarding the quality of the product were first introduced to the child between the ages of 2 and 3 years, while concepts regarding the cost or availability of these products were introduced at age 4 or 5 years. Mothers introduced concepts related to the persuasive and misleading qualities of advertising at ages 4.0 and 3.7 respectively.

Most mothers indicated that they had been either somewhat or very successful in teaching the child a concept, as evidenced by fewer children's purchase requests, increased acceptance of purchase request denials, or the child's ability to verbalize the concepts taught. It is possible that the degree of success predicted by mothers may have been over rated; Ward and Wackman (1973) reported that 56% of 4 and 5 year old children had no awareness of the persuasive or selling motive in commercials, and that only 4% had a clear understanding of it. These authors also showed that about 50% of kindergarten children think that commercials tell the truth "all the time." However the findings are not necessarily contradictory. Perhaps with teaching, a child could come to grasp the concepts earlier than children who have not had that advantage. Fruitful research could be conducted to explore this possibility.

Factors Influencing the Extent of Mothers' Teaching about Television Advertising

Developmental theory suggested that teaching children to understand television advertising would be assumed if the rewards for doing it were greater than the sanctions, if the task were perceived to be a part of the individual's role, and if its undertaking would reduce conflicting demands on the individual (Duvall, 1971). Television advertising is designed to motivate childrens' purchase requests. A parent could face conflicting demands as a result of advertising directed toward children, because parents who must keep the family financially solvent (Duvall, 1971), would probably have to deny a significant proportion of children's purchase requests. If the child reacts negatively to a denied purchase request, the parent

would again face conflicting demands: the need to maintain the morale of the child (Duvall, 1971), while keeping the family financially solvent.

Thus it was predicted that the degree to which television advertising affected children's purchase requests and the child's responses to denied purchase requests, would influence the extent to which the mother taught the child to comprehend television advertising. Developmental theory also suggests that before a parent would assume a task, she or he must believe that it is part of his or her role and that there are benefits in performing the task. Consequently, it was also predicted that the extent of a mothers' teaching responses would depend on the degree to which a mother reported that teaching about television advertising was her responsibility, and the number of costs and benefits she identified as resulting from completing the task.

Research Question #1. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the amount of children's purchase requests stimulated by television advertising? (proposition 1)

The independent variable, the degree to which television advertising affected the child's purchase requests, was not found to be associated with the mother's teaching behavior. It is possible that the degree to which television advertising affects children's purchase requests is not salient to a mother's teaching response, or that the instrument or sample size was inadequate. However there is perhaps a more interesting explanation.

Models of consumer behavior (Howard, Sheth, 1973; Engel, Kollat and Blackwell, 1978) suggest that evaluation (i.e. evaluation of

television advertising's impact on a child, relative to other children) is a stronger predictor of behavior than is knowledge (i.e., awareness that television advertising motivates purchase requests). It is possible that a mother's evaluation of how much television advertising affects her child's purchase requests are subjective evaluations not totally dependent on an objective number of child's purchase requests. This became apparent during interviewing, when many mothers interjected comments about the extent of television advertising's impact on their child, relative to its impact on other children. These comments did not appear to accurately reflect the more objective reporting of purchase requests although systematic observation which could confirm this was not undertaken. Future research could explore the extent to which subjective evaluations of the effect of television advertising on a child, agree with the more objective reporting of children's purchase requests. Questions in this study measured the number of children's purchase requests motivated by television advertising. Both of these measures of a mother's report of television advertising's affect on her child's purchase requests could be correlated with the extent of her teaching behavior. Research along these dimensions would shed light on both consumer decision making and reasons behind mothers' behavior toward television advertising.

Research Question #2. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the degree of negativity the child experiences as a result of a denied purchase request that was motivated by television advertising? (proposition 2) Unlike the prediction, mothers' teaching responses were not associated with the negativity of children's reaction to denied purchase requests. This

may have been due to the length of time over which the negativity lasted. Mothers reported in conversation that negative responses often were not long lasting. This is given support by Robertson and Rossiter (1976) who studied children's disappointment following the non-receipt of Christmas gifts and found a low level of disappointment two weeks after the denial. They suggested that children's disappointment would be higher immediately after denial. The short duration of negative responses may have reduced their significance to the mother.

It is also possible that the mothers reported their children's behavior to be less negative than it actually was. In a projective study by Sheikh and Moleski (1977), 23% of children in kindergarten predicted that a child would simply accept a parent's denial of a purchase request, whereas 38% of mothers in this study predicted that their children would accept their decision without protest. Inaccuracy of reporting the child's reaction, could affect the degree of association between it and the dependent variables.

Additional bias could have occurred because mothers were asked for a global prediction of how their children respond to a denied purchase request. Several mothers qualified their answers with statements such as "it depends on the product." Research by Atkin (1975b) indicated that the extent of negative reaction predicted by mothers varies with the product for which the purchase request was made. For example, mothers reported a child's overt anger in twice as many toy request denials as cereal request denials. Thus, it is possible that the global question which probed how the children reacted to a denied purchase request should have been

more specific. A product specific question might produce more accurate results and an association with the dependent variables in the direction expected.

Research Question #3. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the degree of responsibility perceived for this task? (proposition 3) Support for the proposition that maternal teaching is positively correlated with perceived responsibility was shown, in that the number of planned teaching attempts was positively associated with the extent to which the mother perceived teaching about television advertising to be her responsibility. The four levels of responsibility analyzed in this study, presented in order of greatest to least indication of responsibility, were: (1) mothers who indicated it was their job to teach about television advertising, (2) mothers who indicated they should do it because they were most available when the child was watching television, (3) mothers who indicated they would teach but could not suggest a reason why they should and (4) mothers who indicated that they didn't think it was their role to teach. The more the mother felt that teaching about television advertising was part of her role, the more planned teaching attempts she made.

Contrary to predictions, teaching responses following television-motivated purchase requests were not associated with the degree to which the mother assumed the responsibility to be hers. Mothers did not use television-motivated purchase requests as an opportunity to teach about the misleading or persuasive qualities of television advertising. Teaching about other marketplace variables did occur but was not associated with mothers' perception of responsibility

for teaching. Further research will be necessary to explain the reasons for this.

Research Question #4. How does the extent of maternal teaching about television advertising vary with the perceived costs and/or benefits of performing this task? (proposition 4) As predicted, the number of advantages that a mother identified as existing when teaching the child to understand television advertising was positively associated with the number of planned teaching efforts she made. Benefits of teaching children to understand television advertising included such things as reducing children's purchase requests, reducing negativity in response to a denied purchase request, and facilitating children's consumer education, or knowledge of the marketplace. Disadvantages included such things as confusing the child, making the child suspicious, or consuming too much of the mother's time. The greater the number of advantages cited (and the more the number of advantages exceeded the number of disadvantages cited), the more likely the mother was to plan to teach the child something about television advertising. However it is important to note that the number of disadvantages cited was rather small, and that the citing of disadvantages was infrequent, therefore caution is desirable when interpreting the "advantages minus disadvantages" variable and future study is necessary to confirm this finding. Nevertheless, the proposition is supported by the finding that increased citing of advantages of teaching is positively associated with increased teaching behavior.

Contrary to predictions, the number of advantages cited was not associated with the extent of teaching attempts following a

television-motivated purchase request. Future research is necessary to determine why this was so.

Implications of the Study

While it is interesting to speculate on the possible motivators of a mother's teaching about television advertising and the effectiveness of this teaching, it is important to remember very little teaching was actually undertaken. Approximately 30% of mothers did not respond to a television-motivated purchase request in a manner that could teach something about the marketplace, and one third of mothers had not tried to teach their children anything about television advertising. Among those mothers who made teaching responses to television-motivated purchase requests, only about one half made teaching responses most of the time. Non-teaching responses to purchase requests included the following: refusing or agreeing to make a purchase without explanation, or using non-commital responses such as "we'll see," or "maybe." Planned teaching about television advertising could also not be considered extensive; more than half of the mothers made one or no teaching efforts.

It is possible that mothers were unable to recall or report the extent of teaching that they actually did, but it is equally likely that mothers may have exaggerated their teaching attempts, making socially desirable responses. Thus the extent of reported teaching could be accepted as an estimate of actual behavior unless additional studies with greater methodological validity contradict the findings.

The sample consisted of mothers most likely to make teaching responses as a result of children's exposure to television advertising. Ward et al. (1977) indicated that mothers from middle and upper income

groups were more likely to talk about television advertising and were more apt to use "negotiation" or "refusal with explanation," in response to children's purchase requests. Also mothers of kindergarten age children (not older children) were most likely to explain when refusing a purchase request (Ward et al., 1977). Many of the mothers in this study did not teach about television advertising, suggesting that it is not widespread in the general population of mothers. Yet all but one mother reported that television advertising motivated their child to ask for products and 50% of mothers reported that their child's usual reaction to a denied purchase request was either anger or sadness.

The lack of widespread teaching among mothers in this sample does not necessarily indicate the lack of teaching about television advertising by the parents, for fathers could also participate in teaching the child about marketplace concepts. However there is no apparent reason to suppose that a father would be more active than the mother in the carrying out of this teaching (Sheikh & Moleski, 1978), so for the purposes of this discussion, the extent of parental teaching about television advertising will be considered to be rather limited. This has implications for the child, the family and society.

Duvall (1971) argues that using television constructively is an "especial challenge" to parents of pre-school children. Pre-school children are fascinated by television, so that it becomes an important force shaping children's attitudes towards and expectations of themselves and others (Duvall, 1971). Thus teaching the child to cope with television and television advertising is an important task of parents of kindergarten children.

Successful completion of a developmental task in its culturally

modified forms, is important to the success of related tasks at later stages. Parental teaching of the persuasive intent of television advertising is an important precurser to the teaching of other money-related concepts to children at the school-age stage. Developing meaningful understandings of the use of money by learning to buy wisely and stay within resources, reconciling differences between wants and resources, and getting a basic orientation into the nature of money in everyday life are concepts which parents of school-aged children teach (Duvall, 1971). Parental teaching about television advertising at the pre-school stage eases their task of teaching more advanced marketplace concepts to the child of school-age.

If a parent does not teach the pre-school child to understand television advertising, the teaching of more advanced money-related concepts becomes more difficult (Duvall, 1971). If the child does not learn to cope with the wants which are purportedly generated by television advertising, and learns his or her attitudes and values from this medium, the implications for society could be considerable. As one example, a failure to limit wants that are stimulated by television advertising could result in the increased abuse of consumer credit.

Policy Implications

Policy implications can be drawn from this study, in combination with others. Previous research has shown that children under six do not have the cognitive ability to cope with television advertising (Robertson & Rossiter, 1974; Ward & Wackman, 1973). Mothers in this study reported that children's ability to understand television

advertising was enhanced through teaching, however relatively little teaching was carried out. At the same time, this research and others have shown that the denial of a television-motivated purchase request does result in some negative responses from the child.

The indications are that television advertising poses a problem for the development of the child. However many mothers did not teach their kindergarten child to understand television advertising, because they had never thought about it, or because they felt that such teaching was unimportant. This suggests a need to increase parental awareness of the difficulties the child may have in understanding the purpose of television advertising, developing parental ability to facilitate children's learning of these concepts, and children's coping with desires motivated by television advertising.

This form of parental education could be carried out in adult education classes, or perhaps through the distribution of pamphlets, however there is merit in encouraging television broadcasters to provide this education service via their medium. The former two means of education may not reach those people who could derive the most benefits from learning to educate children to understand television advertising, that is, those with high television exposure, among whom a significant proportion are low-income earners (Gorn & Goldberg, 1977). It has been reported that the poor enjoy and trust television more (Gorn & Goldberg, 1977), so it may be most valuable for the medium to moderate its own commercial messages via equally persuasive, counter-commercial messages. These could be directed both toward children and parents.

It is possible that broadcasters will willingly carry such

messages, although government intervention may be necessary. Faced with the alternative of the outright banning of television advertising to young children, the former procedure for moderating the influence of television advertising may be preferred.

In reference to the debate between marketers and consumer advocates, the latter argue that advertising persuades and manipulates children, affects intra-family processes, generates conflict, and negatively affects the socialization of the child and the development of his or her value systems (Robertson, 1972). Marketers argue that television advertising directed toward children can promote positive family interaction from which the child can learn about the economy and his or her role as a consumer (Robertson, 1972). It appears that while the alternative presented by marketers is feasible, it does not often occur. The scenario presented by consumer advocates seems somewhat more realistic. If it is desirable to avoid the child's negative reaction, and possible negative family interaction, television advertising to children under six should be banned, if some other method of moderating television advertising cannot be implemented.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the limitations of this study, there continues to be need for future research. The non-random sample was selected to meet certain criteria, and therefore the study is limited in terms of its generalizability to the population. The study of samples with different characteristics could greatly enhance the generalizability of these findings. There are identifiable reasons for examining at least two other target groups, including families with lower annual incomes, and families whose children watch greater amounts of television than

the children in this sample.

Mothers in other income groups probably make fewer teaching responses. Ward et al (1972) found that lower income mothers responded with more authoritarian, less explanatory responses. And yet, it is in this group which television advertising can be most disruptive. Greene (1973) explains:

> I can personally testify to the effects of TV induced purchases on poor people. I have seen the hostility this creates in the parents and the disappointment experienced by the children. It is an especially tragic misuse of the airways, the gap between the aspirations raised by such advertising and its fulfillment (p. 65).

This type of testimony and some evidence which suggests that urban poor spend twice as much time viewing TV, like the medium more than the general population and trust TV more than other media (Gorn and Goldberg, 1977) imply a strong potential impact of exposure to television advertising on low-income individuals and their children. The probable lack of counter-balancing teaching activity, can only increase that impact.

Even if counterbalancing teaching activity does occur, it may be less effective for mothers with children who watch a great deal of television. Children in this sample watched an average of 12.6 hours of television each week (Brown, 1978). Half of the mothers in this sample reported their kindergarten child's usual response was to some extent negative yet it has been shown that high television exposure increases the child's disappointment when denied a purchase request (Robertson & Rossiter, 1976; Atkin, 1975). How much more negative would the response of a child who watches a great deal of television be? A group worth investigating would be families with children

having high television exposure. The combination of low teaching behavior and high television exposure may well occur in low income homes.

In addition to varying the sample characteristics, several suggestions for future research can be made. These arise from the limitations of this study. Though discussed earlier, these suggestions can be summarized as follows:

1. to determine if the extent of teaching behavior following a television motivated purchase request varies with any of the four independent variables in this study, and if not, why not?

2. to determine if the degree of the child's negativity following a denied purchase request covaries with the extent of a mother's teaching about television advertising, and if not, why not? A modification of the research instrument is suggested in order to incorporate a specific, rather than global indicator of children's reactions to denied purchase requests.

3. to determine if mother's teaching behavior covaries with (1) the degree to which television advertising motivates children's purchase requests, or (2) the mother's beliefs or attitudes about the degree to which television advertising motivates their child's purchase requests relative to other children.

4. to determine why the pattern of teaching responses following a child's purchase request, differs from the pattern of planned teaching responses.

Several other implications or suggestions for research have been made in the previous discussion. These can be summarized as follows:

5. to determine if a child's lack of understanding of television

advertising impairs his or her accomplishment of more sophisticated, money related, developmental tasks.

6. to determine if teaching about television advertising results in the child's greater understanding of its persuasive, exaggerated nature.

7. to determine the extent to which fathers participate in teaching the child to understand television advertising.

8. to determine if Canadian and American views of television advertising directed toward children differ.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Mother's Use of TV Advertising

As Teaching Opportunity

Interviewer's Name: _____

Questionnaire No.: _____ Date: _____

Length of Interview: _____ Time of Interview: _____

Name of Respondent: _____

Phone No. of Respondent: _____

Address of Respondent: _____

Call Backs:

This survey will ask two kinds of questions about being a consumer. Some questions will ask how you act as a consumer. Other questions will ask about your child _____. Please try to focus on _____. It may be hard not to think of your other children, but try and focus on just this one child. All answers will be kept confidential.

1. First, I'm going to read you a list of products you may buy and that _____ may ask for. Please indicate how often _____ tries to get you to buy that product for himself/herself, or for the family. Does _____ ask for (READ ITEM) very often, pretty often, not too often, or never?

	ASKS			
	Very Often	Pretty Often	Not Too Often	Never
a. cereal				
b. snack food				
c. shampoo				
d. candy				
e. toothpaste				
f. a game or toy				
g. aspirin				
h. soft drinks				
i. clothing				
j. record album				
k. household cleaner				
l. soup				

2. Interviewer: Go back over the list of products and for each product that was not answered "never" ask:

   Kids often ask for products because of some outside influence. Here is a card which lists some of the possible influences on a child (HAND CARD TO MOTHER). Please read it. (WAIT UNTIL MOTHER HAS READ CARD.) As I read the list of items, please tell me what most influences _____ to ask for the item.

CARD:

Influenced mostly by
- a. Seeing it on TV
- b. Seeing it in store
- c. Friend's influence
- d. Other influence

	TV	Store	Friend	Other (ask mother to specify)
a. cereal				
b. snack food				
c. shampoo				
d. candy				
e. toothpaste				
f. a game or toy				
g. aspirin				
h. soft drinks				
i. clothing				
j. record album				
k. household cleaner				
l. soup				

3. Interviewer: Go back over the list of products and for each product where TV was identified as the main influence ask: As I describe some products, please tell me what you did the last time _____ asked you for the product, after she/he saw it advertised on television.

	3. Response
a. cereal	
b. snack food	
c. shampoo	
d. candy	
e. toothpaste	
f. game or toy	
g. aspirin	
h. soft drinks	
i. clothing	
j. record album	
k. household cleanser	
l. soup	

4. How does _____ usually react when you refuse to buy something she/he has asked for after seeing it on television?

_____

_____

5. How many TV sets are there in your home? _____

6. Do you own cable TV? _____

How many hours per day do you usually spend watching TV (READ INSERT)

7. during the week? _____

8. on weekends? _____

How many hours per day does _____ usually spend watching TV (READ INSERT)

9. during the week? _____

10. on weekends? _____

About how many hours per day do you usually spend watching television with your child _____

11. during the week? _____

12. on weekends? _____

13. a. Do you ever talk to _____ about TV commercials?

_____ yes

_____ no (SKIP TO QUESTION 14)

b. What do you talk about? (PROBE: Anything else?)

c. (FOR EACH OF THE ITEMS IDENTIFIED AS "TALKED ABOUT" IN QUESTION 13b. ASK) About how often do you talk about (ITEM IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 13b.), very often, pretty often, not too often, or almost never?

WHAT IS DISCUSSED	FREQUENCY OF DISCUSSION

14. I'd like to know what you think would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of teaching kids to understand TV advertising. (PROBE: anything else?)

15. If kids could be taught to understand why we have TV advertising and what it tries to do, who do you think should do the teaching? (PROBE: Why?)

16. a. Is there anything you would like _____ to know about TV advertising? (PROBE: What? BE SPECIFIC)
b. Do you think that _____ already knows that (INSERT RESPONSE TO 14a.) (IF NO, CIRCLE THAT ITEM ON CHART).
c. Have you ever tried to teach this to _____? (1=yes, 2=no)
d. Why did you try/not try to teach this to _____?

IF TEACHING ATTEMPTED

e. How old was _____ when you first tried to teach him/her that (INSERT ITEM TO BE TAUGHT)
f. How have you tried to teach this to _____?
g. How much effect do you think your efforts had on _____, 1=a big effect, 2=some effect, or 3=no effect?
h. How can you tell?

a. ITEM/	b. CIRCLE = no	c	d. WHY	AGE	f. METHOD OF TEACHING	g	h. CRITERIA OF EFFECTS

Now I would like to obtain some information about this household, so that I can classify the data I am collecting.

17. Including yourself, how many persons live here altogether, related to you or not?

Adults _____
Children _____

18. Now a list of the members of this household. To make it easier, I'm going to ask for the first name of each member.

	FIRST NAME	SEX	AGE	RELATIONSHIP TO RESPONDENT
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

19. What is the highest level of education you/your spouse have completed?

		YOU	YOUR SPOUSE
No schooling		01	01
Elementary	-incomplete	02	02
	-complete	03	03
Junior High	-incomplete	04	04
	-complete	05	05
High School	-incomplete	06	06
	-complete	07	07
Some college or university		08	08
Bachelor's degree		09	09
Master's degree		10	10
Professional Degree or Doctorate		11	11
Don't know		88	88

20. In total, how many years of schooling do you/does your spouse have? (Includes total of grade school, high school, vocational and university.)

Respondent _____ years
Spouse _____ years

21. What does your husband do for a living? (PROBE TO GET DESCRIPTIONS LIKE THIS: He's a sales clerk, waits on customers in a department store.) (SUGGESTED PROBES: What is his job called? What kind of business or industry does he work in? What does he do on his job?) (PROBE TO DETERMINE FULL OR PART-TIME.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. Do you hold a job? _____

IF YES, What is this job? (PROBE TO GET DESCRIPTION AS FOR HUSBAND.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

23. Now, for the purpose of this survey, I need to get a rough indication of the income of your family. Looking at this card, could you tell me which number comes closest to the total family income for this past year before tax and deductions?

CARD:

Under $5,000.....01	25,000 - 29,999.....06
5,000 - 9,999.....02	30,000 - 34,999.....07
10,000 - 14,999.....03	35,000 - 39,999.....08
15,000 - 19,999.....04	$40,000 and over.....09
20,000 - 24,999.....05	

Don't know.....88
No response.....99

Thank-you very much for your time and effort in filling out this questionnaire. Do you have any questions that you would like to ask?

Would you like a copy of the findings?